



**NONCONFORMITY OF TEACHER AND STUDENTS IN
PETER WEIR'S *DEAD POETS SOCIETY***

**A THESIS
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for
the Sarjana Degree Majoring American Studies in English Department
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

**Submitted by:
GERALD LEONARDO AGUSTINO
13020113190034**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY
SEMARANG
2017**

PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer honestly confirms that he compiled this thesis entitled “Nonconformity of Teacher and Students in *Dead Poets Society*” by himself and without taking any result from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and in diploma degree of any university. The writer ascertains also that he did not quote any material from other publications of someone else’s paper except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, 14 June 2017

Gerald Leonardo Agustino

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul.”

----- **William Ernest Henley, *Invictus***

“To be great is to be misunderstood.”

----- **Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance***

“You shoot me in a dream, you’d better wake up and apologize.”

----- **Mr. White (Harvey Keitel), *Reservoir Dogs***

“If I could start again

a million miles away

I would keep myself

I would find a way.”

----- **Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails), *Hurt***

*This thesis is dedicated to my family and everyone who
supported me to accomplish this thesis.*

APPROVAL
NONCONFORMITY OF TEACHER AND STUDENTS IN
DEAD POETS SOCIETY

Written by:
Gerald Leonardo Agustino
NIM: 13020113190034

is approved by Thesis Advisor
on June 15, 2017

Thesis Advisor,

Sukarni Suryaningsih, S.S., M. Hum.
NIP. 197212231998022001

The Head of the English Department,

Dr. Agus Subianto, M.A.
NIP. 196408141990011001

VALIDATION

Approved by

Strata 1 Thesis Examination Committee
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University

On July 25, 2017

Chair Person

First Member

Ariya Jati, S.S., M.A.

NIP. 197802282005021001

M. Irfan Zamzami, S.S., M.Hum.

NIK. 198609230115091000

Second Member

Third Member

Prof. Dr. Nurdien H. Kistanto, M.A.

NIP. 195211031980121001

Hadiyanto, S.S., M.Hum.

NI

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Praise be to God Almighty who has always bestowed His blessings to the writer so that this thesis entitled “Nonconformity of Teacher and Students in Peter Weir’s *Dead Poets Society*” came into a completion. On this occasion, the writer would like to thank those who have contributed to the completion of this thesis.

The writer’s deepest gratitude and appreciation are extended to Mrs. Sukarni Suryaningsih S.S., M. Hum., for by her valuable advices, helpful corrections, and useful guidance, the writer has been able to complete this thesis properly. The writer would also like to thank the following people:

1. Dr. Rediyanto Noor M. Hum., as the Dean of Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University.
2. Dr. Agus Subiyanto M.A., as the Head of the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University.
3. All of the lecturers in the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University who have given a lot of important knowledges and shared a lot of valuable experiences to the writer. The writer always believes that one of the best, most beautiful parts of learning is to experience great individuals.
4. The writer’s beloved family whose prayers and supports are always important to keep the writer going on completing his study.
5. The writer’s friends in English Department of Diponegoro University 2013 who have been the best companions for the writer while walking on this road called “higher education”.

The writer realizes that this thesis is still far from perfection. Therefore, he will be grateful to receive any constructive criticisms, recommendations, and suggestions to make this thesis better.

Finally, the writer's highest expectation of this thesis is that this thesis can be useful to the readers who are curious and wish to learn about the nonconformity in order to live their life to the fullest.

Semarang, 14 June 2017

Gerald Leonardo Agustino

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ABSTRACT

Dead Poets Society is an Academy-Award winning film which tells the story of an unconventional English teacher who motivates his students to live their life to the fullest. In an educational institution which is full of rules, John Keating and seven of his students are shown to be the individuals who are breaking the school rules. This thesis deals with the nonconformity aspects which exist in the movie *Dead Poets Society* focusing mostly on the life of John Keating and seven of his students. The aim of this writing is to analyze the intrinsic aspects of the movie including narrative and cinematic elements and the extrinsic aspects of the movie, the nonconformity of teacher and students using Ralph Waldo Emerson's ideas of nonconformity in *Self-Reliance*. Library research is used to collect the data needed for this thesis. The writer uses objective approach to analyze the intrinsic aspects of the movie, and for the extrinsic aspects, the writer uses *Self-Reliance* as the main theory. The results show that the nonconformity of John Keating has motivated seven of his students to also be a nonconformist like him.

Keywords: *Dead Poets Society*, nonconformity, teacher-students relationship

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

What older people have taught to their following generation from time to time is that they should respect their country by knowing what the founding fathers of their country have believed and done to their country in the past. A lot of essential philosophical ideas which created a country came from them. The writer believes that no country is great without the struggle of its people. The people, the citizen of a country, obviously is the most fundamental aspect to make a country stands powerfully.

In *Introduction to Sociology*, Tischler argues that individualism is one of the values which Americans have to fulfil their individual happiness, in which he adds Americans believe that one should be happy with his life (2008: 63). In the writer's opinion, individualism and the way American people struggle to reach the highest welfare of their life are two of the most relevant thoughts or philosophical ideas of the Americans today. The writer considers individualism as the perspective which believes that a person should struggle individually to reach the highest welfare of their life without help from other persons. A person can live a better life because he struggles to reach such a life by himself and for himself. Apart from individualism, other American popular thought is nonconformity.

Related to individualism, nonconformity is another thought popular in American society because it deals with the ideas that a person should never surrender

their own thoughts, beliefs, and actions which come from within themselves so that they can harmonize with those of the others. Thus, a person should also represent their own originality without being afraid to show it to the world. Nonconformity was born from the minds of some American transcendentalists who believed they have to do something because at that time they were still under the shadow of the Puritans who were the majority of residents of the state of Massachusetts. These transcendental thoughts were abundantly propagated in the form of literary works.

Among the nineteenth century American Transcendentalists, Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson are two of the most popular American Transcendentalists at the moment (Wilson, 2000: 2). They both are known for pioneering the Transcendentalist Club in Concord, Massachusetts with some other like-minded intelligences. To exclude Thoreau and other nineteenth Century American Transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson is an epitome of nonconformity because there are essential ideas of nonconformity in one of his essays entitled *Self-Reliance* (1841). In the essay, Emerson states:

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude (Emerson, 1841).

That quotation easily demonstrates one of the essential ideas of nonconformity. From that quotation, it can be seen that Emerson really encourages people to respect

themselves as a person, not as a member of society, in which it is a proper explanation of nonconformity as an understandable philosophical idea.

That foundation of America's nonconformity ideas can also be seen through its products of popular culture such as literary works and movies. Movie, as one of the most effective means of presenting philosophical ideas of certain society, plays an important role in defining what America is. The writer highly believes that through movies America succeeds to promote to the world their philosophical ideas.

One of the movies which describes the nonconformity in American society is 1989's *Dead Poets Society*. It depicts the nonconformity which happens in educational setting. The nonconformists are the teacher and the students, in which they are supposed to follow the rules given by the school as an educational institution. Therefore, this makes the movie interesting and worthy to be analyzed; how the individuals who have to follow the rule is at the same time the ones who break the rule.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

To make the discussion clear, the writer limits the scope of this thesis into two limitations. The two limitations are the intrinsic aspects and the extrinsic aspects of the movie *Dead Poets Society*. The intrinsic aspects are narrative and cinematic elements of the movie. The extrinsic aspects are the nonconformity aspects in the movie.

The object of the research is the movie *Dead Poets Society* (1989) with the main discussion will focus on the character of John Keating and seven of his students who revive the Dead Poets Society club. Those seven students are Neil Perry, Todd

Anderson, Knox Overstreet, Charlie Dalton, Richard Cameron, Gerard Pitts, and Steven Meeks.

The writer identifies the extrinsic elements using Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay, *Self-Reliance*. Emerson's point of view about nonconformity is the main theory to use in analyzing John Keating and seven of his students.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

There are two important aims that the writer concentrates in writing this thesis.

Those two include:

1. To describe the intrinsic aspects of *Dead Poets Society* movie.
2. To analyze the aspects of nonconformity that are depicted in the movie and exist in the character of John Keating and seven of his students who revive the Dead Poets Society club.

1.4 METHODS OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 Method of Research

The writer uses library research as the research method to get the data needed. There are two kinds of data which are used in this research. The main data is from the movie *Dead Poets Society* and the supporting data is from the books, journals, and other articles either in the printed or electronic form.

1.4.2 Method of Approach

The writer uses objective approach to analyze the intrinsic aspects of the movie. Abrams explains that objective approach "regards the work of art in isolation from all these external points of reference, analyzes it as a self-sufficient entity constituted by

its parts in their internal relations, and sets out to judge it solely by criteria intrinsic to its own mode of being” (1971: 26). Therefore, the objective approach is the approach which focuses on the movie or film work as it is. It does not relate with the author or the reader. Intrinsic aspects of the movie covers narrative and cinematic elements of the movie. The narrative elements in general include theme, setting, character, and plot while the cinematic element includes the cinematic aspects in the movie such as camera distance, camera movement, and, sound.

The extrinsic element which the writer uses is the nonconformity ideas that are written in Emerson’s *Self Reliance* (1841). Nonconformity in *Self-Reliance* is the encouraging thoughts delivered by him believing that a person should stay true to the beliefs and thoughts that came from within themselves, and convert them into actions. By doing so, a person should never be afraid to show their own originality to the world.

1.5 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER 1: Introduction. In Introduction, the writer explains about background of the study, scope of the study, aims of the study, methods of the study, and organization of the study.

CHAPTER 2: The Summary of the Movie. It covers the synopsis of the movie with a few additional information about the movie.

CHAPTER 3: Literary Review. It contains the theoretical review of the thesis. The review will be about the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the movie.

CHAPTER 4: Nonconformity of Teacher and Students in *Dead Poets Society*. This is the main, longest chapter of this thesis. It contains all the theoretical review along with

the narrative element and also the intrinsic and extrinsic aspect of the movie. This is the main chapter to discuss what have been concerned in the background of the study.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion. It concludes the results of the analysis of the whole writing.

CHAPTER 2

SUMMARY OF *DEAD POETS SOCIETY*

Dead Poets Society is a 1989 American drama movie directed by Peter Weir. The screenplay of the movie was written by Tom Schulman. The cast of the movie includes Robin Williams, Ethan Hawke, and Robert Sean Leonard. It was nominated for 4 Academy Awards nominations in 1990. The nominations are for Best Original Screenplay for Tom Schulman, which was the only winning-nomination, Best Actor in Leading Role for Robin Williams, Best Director for Peter Weir, and Best Picture.

The year is 1959, and the place is Welton Academy, as an opening ceremony for a new semester starts. Welton Academy is an elite preparatory school for male. Todd Anderson (Ethan Hawke) is a new student to move to Welton but his brother was a former valedictorian in that school. After the opening ceremony, the students bid farewell to their parents and go to the dormitory. As Todd is going to his room, he meets his roommate, Neil Perry (Robert Sean Leonard). Neil, as a friendly roommate, introduces Todd to his best friends: Knox Overstreet (Josh Charles), Richard Cameron (Dylan Kussman), Steve Meeks (Allelon Ruggiero), Gerard Pitts (James Waterston), and Charlie Dalton (Gale Hansen).

Welton Academy has a new English teacher. His name is John Keating (Robin Williams), and he is an alumnus of Welton Academy. On the first day of his lecture, he makes Neil, Todd, Neil's best friends, and other students confused. He makes the students out of the class to the hall of fame, and in the hall of fame, he tells his students to make their life extraordinary. He also encourages the students to "seize their day",

as a reference to the Latin expression *carpe diem*. He even lets his students call him with another signature call. Instead of calling him “Mr. Keating” or “Sir”, he insists them to call him “O, Captain. My Captain!”.

Different from the other teachers in Welton, John Keating teaches in a way that is new to the students. Suitable to what subject that he masters, John Keating teaches English through encouragements and other colorful actions while the other teachers are too conventional and somewhat uninteresting. Apart of the unconventional ways of teaching that he does, there are also some “rule-breaking” things happen in his class that make the students amazed by him. One of them happens when he teaches poetry. He encourages his students to tear the first pages of the poetry book containing some introduction that contains theory of poetry. He also tells his students to live their life in different ways.

Neil, Todd, and the other five best friends are among the students who are amazed by Keating. They are interested to know more about him and to be taught more by him. Their life change even more as they find out that Keating was once a member of Dead Poets Society from a yearbook from Keating’s years as a student in Welton. After asking about the club to Keating, they find out that Dead Poets Society is a club that consists of students who were interested in literature. They would go out in the dark searching for some cave near the school, and there in the cave, they would be reading and writing some poems.

Being the students of John Keating and the members of Dead Poets Society club has made their life extraordinary. They feel like they have lived their life to the fullest.

Keating's extraordinary way of teaching extends to the idea which states that he is a nonconformity. He tells the students through his encouragements that conformity is dangerous, and that they should think for themselves. That way of thinking results in him being forced to conform to the conventional teaching way by Headmaster Nolan. However, he success to make his students to live their life to the fullest.

Neil Perry has convinced that he should play in a drama that he dreams of in spite of his conquering father. Todd Anderson has been a more confident and open person since he encountered his friends and Keating who have encouraged him a lot of time. Knox Overstreet has been brave enough to pursue the love of his life by the power of "*carpe diem*". Richard Cameron has pretty much been himself. Steve Meeks and Gerard Pitts have enjoyed their intelligence as if it is their source of pleasure, and Charlie Dalton has been the biggest badass Welton has ever had by rebelling against the rule and Headmaster Nolan.

They become best friends and they have escaped from their previous mundane life that was filled with rules and standards from other people in their life. And then, a tragedy happens to Neil Perry which makes everything goes bad for the students and Keating's life. Unable to obey his father any longer, Neil decides to take his own life. The students are forced to stop their activities in the club because Neil's father and Headmaster Nolan believe the club is the cause of Neil's suicide. At last, the mind behind the revived club, John Keating, is also required to be out of Welton Academy.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 INTRINSIC ASPECTS

3.1.1 Narrative Elements

When talking about a story, it is inevitable for one to relate to the narrative elements which the story is contained with. The writer thinks that narrative elements, as the general construction of a story, hold a highly important role to create a story because without narrative elements, a story will not be a story. The narrative elements also hold a massive role to develop a story, particularly in fictional works.

Film can be considered as one of fictional works. It tells a story by depicting certain events through the screen. Similar to the story in the book, the story in the movie is also written firstly in the form of a screenplay. Either written or blatantly visible on screen, there are narrative elements in the movie *Dead Poets Society*, in which the writer only focuses on its theme, character, setting, and conflict.

3.1.1.1 Theme

Theme can be considered as an essential narrative element because it is the element where a story's ideas are told. In her book entitled *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, Jane Burroway explains:

Theme involves emotion, logic, and judgment, all three—but the pattern that forms the particular experience of that theme is made up of every element of fiction this book has discussed: the arrangement, shape, and flow of the action, as performed by the characters, realized in their details, seen in their atmosphere, from a unique point of view, through the imagery and the rhythm of the language (1992: 299).

From the explanation, theme can be identified by the relation of certain elements in a story including characters and their action. In the movie, theme is told in scenes where the characters in the movie do, say, or think of something.

There are two types of theme that is developed in every story. Those two types of theme are major and minor theme. Major theme is the theme that is continually told in a story while minor theme is the theme that appears in the movie in which it has only certain sequences.

3.1.1.2 Character

“Stories can’t exist if either plot or characters are missing” (Barsam, 2010: 134). That quotation is absolutely true. While talking about a story, it is impossible not to talk about a character. For it is one of the most important elements of narrative that should be exist in a story, a character cannot be excluded from a story.

The definition of character stated by Barsam in the book *Looking at Movies* is one of the clearest definitions of character, particularly in movies. According to Barsam, character is beings, can be people or not, that possess noticeable “traits, habits, and disposition” in order to make narrative elements in the movie properly developed (2010: 134).

In addition to the definition of character, there are also several types of character to be discussed in this sub-chapter to give the information about essential types of character that the audience always find in a movie. These types of character are highly in relation to the plot of the movie, and they are: flat character, round character, protagonist, and antagonist (Barsam, 2010: 134).

In defining the flat and round character, Barsam correlates his definition to E. M. Forster definition. Forster defines flat character as a character that is constructed in a single trait or characteristic, and the round character is defined as a character that is constructed with more than one trait or characteristic (Forster, 1955: 67). In a movie, the flat character is often portrayed by the supporting actors, and the round character by the main actors. In addition, main actors who play major character usually have a more screen-time than the supporting ones who play minor character.

Another two of the types of character are protagonist and antagonist. Barsam defines the protagonist as the hero and the antagonist as the villain of a movie (2010: 15). His further definition of protagonist states that it “can be a hero, and those heroes can either be good guys or bad guys in their struggle with whatever they oppose or that opposes them.” On the other hand, the antagonist is “a character opposing the protagonist, and thus, in all likelihood, the one who provokes the protagonist’s actions or reactions” (Barsam, 2010: 135).

To support the definition of character mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is relational to also mention about characterization. Woloch argues that characterization is “the tension between the authenticity of a character in-and-of-himself and the reduction of the character into the thematic or symbolic field” (2003: 15). It can be seen from Woloch’s perspective about characterization that to distinct a character is the main point of characterization.

3.1.1.3 Setting

Generally, a setting is only divided into two categories: setting of time and setting of place. However, it is also important to identify the setting of social environment because it can support the two previously-mentioned settings and give more information about the story. While character seems to be the foreground of a story, setting delivers a role of background to a story (Burroway, 1992: 166). The setting of a story delivers an important role to the story itself because it marks when and where the story take place.

It might be easier to notice and get the idea of a setting when the setting of a certain story is set in a film format. It might be so because the story told in a movie is being depicted, and by that, it means that the audience of a movie see the settings when they are watching a movie.

The events which characters in a story play in might be the major thing that the audience focuses on. However, with or without the audience's realization, the setting of a story helps to give them the supporting information about the events in which the characters play in.

According to Bordwell (2008: 112), setting is included in the five aspects of *mise en scène*, everything shown in a scene. In correlation to the art of theatre, Bordwell's statement about setting deals mostly to the time and place. The clearer, more definitive definition of setting in the movie which the writer found is explained by Barsam. Setting is the time and place where the story in the movie takes place

(Barsam, 2010: 138). The categories of setting can be identified easier as it is defined with example.

1. Setting of Place

Setting of place is about the location where the story takes place. It can be in a country, city, room, etc. The process of making and shooting the setting of place can be done either in the actual place or in the studio.

2. Setting of Time

Setting of time is about the period of time when the story of a movie happens. It mostly deals with date or year.

3. Setting of Social Environment

Not only establishing the time and place, setting also provides social environment of the characters in a movie, including social, educational, and cultural background (Barsam, 2010: 138).

3.1.1.4 Conflict

It is maybe overly used, but Perrine definition about conflict is, to the writer opinion, the most understandable. Perrine explains:

Conflict is a clash of actions, desire, ideas, or goods in the plot of a story or drama. Conflict may exist between the main character and some other person or persons (man against man); between the main character and some external force, physical nature, society, or fate (man against environment), or between the main character and some destructive element in his own nature (man against himself) (1988: 1408).

To support Perrine explanation about conflict, the writer also adds Burroway's argument about conflict. Burroway argues that "conflict is the first encountered and the

fundamental element of fiction, necessary because in literature, only trouble is interesting.” She also adds that conflict cannot be the main thing in a plot because there are also positive things in life to be told in a plot, but conflict plays an important role to make the plot more thought-provoking (1992: 39).

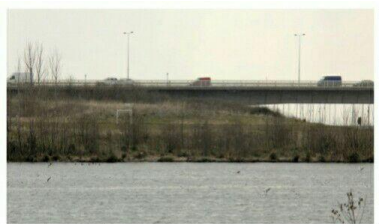
3.1.2 Cinematic Elements

While narrative elements construct a story, cinematic elements in the movie are often utilised by filmmakers to deliver the story to be showed to the audience. The cinematic elements might even be as highly important as the narrative elements since things like camera distance, camera movement, camera angle, and the use of sound can also be the tools of showing the visual representation of the story from the screenplay.

3.1.2.1 Camera Distance

3.1.2.1.1 Extreme Long Shot

The definition of extreme long shot is that it is used to shoot objects of which distance is far from the camera. The objects to shoot with the extreme long shot distance are for example scenery and the whole of a building.



Picture 3.1 : Extreme Long Shot
Source : *Learnaboutfilm.com*

3.1.2.1.2 Long Shot

Edgar-Hunt, Marland, and Rawle also explain “long shot is used to shoot human figures with the background of the setting. Long shot (LS): human figures are more distinct, but background is still very visible.”



Picture 3.2 : Long Shot
Source : *Learnaboutfilm.com*

3.1.2.1.3 Medium Long Shot

Medium long shot (MLS): the human figure is framed from around the knees upwards. French critics refer to this shot as the plan *américain* (American shot).



Picture 3.3 : Medium Long Shot
Source : *Learnaboutfilm.com*

3.1.2.1.4 Medium Close-up

Medium close-up (MCU): individuals framed from the waist upwards. This is one of the most typical shots in television, which, due to its greater intimacy over the cinema screen, often avoids big close-up shots.



Picture 3.4 : Medium Close-up
Source : *Learnaboutfilm.com*

3.1.2.1.5 Close-up

Close-up shot, according to Edgar-Hunt, Marland, and Rawle in *Basics Film-Making: The Language of Film*, is:

Close-up (CU): generally emphasises individual details such as faces, hands, feet, small objects. CUs are regularly used to give the viewer an insight into significant narrative details: important character reactions, a significant item (like a key being secretly hidden in someone's pocket) or to stress the importance of a line of dialogue.



Picture 3.5 : Close-up
Source : *Learnaboutfilm.com*

3.1.2.1.6 Extreme Close-up

This is the camera distance with the small details of objects to shoot like the smallest part of human body such as eyes, lips, and other small objects. (Edgar-Hunt, Marland, and Rawle, 2010: 124).



Picture 3.6 : Extreme Close-up
Source : *Learnboutfilm.com*

3.1.2.2 Sound

Sound represents the elements in the movie which deal with hearing sense. The types of sound in the movie can be divided into four categories: vocal sounds (dialogue and narration), environmental sounds (ambient sound, sound effects, and foley sound), music, and silence (Barsam & Monahan, 2010: 379).

The writer focuses only on dialogue in analysing the vocal sounds in *Dead Poets Society*. Still according to Barsam and Monahan, a dialogue is the speech performed by the characters in the movie either onscreen or offscreen (2010: 379).

Ambient sound, as one of the types of environmental sounds, is an emerging sound from the ambience or the background of the film setting which aim is to help setting the mood, atmosphere, and the meaning of a scene.

The sound effects in the movie consist of those simulated creation of real things and electronically created sounds to be included in the movie (Barsam & Monahan, 2010: 381).

Music includes songs and scores. A simple additional purpose of music in the film is explained by Barsam and Monahan by stating “like other types of sound, music

can be intrinsic, helping to tell the story, whether it pertains to plot, action, character, or mood; indeed, music plays an indispensable role in many movies” (2010: 383).

3.2 EXTRINSIC ASPECT

3.2.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson as a Transcendentalist

Born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1802, Ralph Waldo Emerson is known as one of the most popular 19th Century American citizens whose merits remain important to America up to now. In the introduction chapter of the collection of Emerson’s works entitled *Essays and Poems*, Tony Tanner specifies that there are many terms to be labelled to Emerson regarding his roles in 19th Century American society. These so-called labels relate to everything he had been done in the period of his life: “Scholar, Seer, Reformer, Man of Genius, Contemplative Man, Hero, Poet, Transcendentalist, Student, Saint, Dissenter, Torch-bearer, Idealist, Aspirant, Radical” (1995 : xxii).

Among them, Emerson as a transcendentalist is the label that quite possibly be in the mind of everyone who knows him if they are being asked about the most popular role of Emerson in the history of America. The writer believes that the figure of Ralph Waldo Emerson as one of the most important and prominent American transcendentalists holds an important relationship to the idea that he proposes in every writing of him. It is important to be familiar with transcendentalism and at least get the idea about it before knowing Emerson’s perspective and role in the transcendentalism itself. But firstly, it is also equally important to know how the Transcendentalism was born in America.

What seems to be the irritating problem which Emerson and his fellow intellectuals concern at the moment was the huge influence of Puritanism in the so-called New England society. In *Romanticism and Transcendentalism (1800 - 1860)*, it is written that the Puritans, influenced by the Calvinistic dogmas, “argued that all people were born in sin, that God’s grace fell on the predestined, and that the rest would be damned” (Philip & Ladd, 2006: 33). The Transcendentalists at the moment, Emerson in particular, are bravely important to be rebelling against the idea of Puritanism. Ralph Waldo Emerson can be considered as one of the greatest American Transcendentalists because of his initiative in pioneering The Transcendental Club after he had resigned his occupation as a Unitarian minister so “that he might think freely, and not be bound by certain dogmas”. This club was famously known as a Concord, Massachusetts-based club of thinkers which in 1836, shared their views about American thought, philosophy, art, education, and religion (Philip & Ladd, 2006: 32).

Transcendentalism is a term historically used to refer to the ideology of some notable American figures in the nineteenth Century America. Nineteenth Century American figures, particularly the intellectuals whose philosophical ideas mostly expressed in various forms of literature, were firstly influenced by the European Romanticism, a movement predominantly well-known in its literature and arts in the late eighteen to the early nineteenth century which popular figures include some notable European writers and artists such as William Blake and Lord Byron. Philip and Ladd, regarding the similarity between European Romanticism and Transcendentalism, explain:

Like European Romanticism, Transcendentalism shares many of the same characteristic attitudes: a deep appreciation of nature; a preference of emotion over reason; a belief in the self and the potential of the individual; a predilection for the artist in particular and the creative spirit in general; and a distrust of classical forms and traditions (2006: 34).

Similar to European romanticism, the idea of transcendentalism that the nineteenth century American intellectuals propose are expressed mostly in their writing, and most of them were popular to spend their contemplation about human being and everything in between.

Although there are so many attempts by the experts in defining Transcendentalism, there is still a huge uncertainty about the most definite meaning of it. In fact, the term Transcendentalism and Transcendentalist were firstly designated by the people outside the Transcendentalism community at the moment. Despite the uncertain definition, a general meaning of Transcendentalism can be comprehended by looking at the essential idea of it that the Transcendentalists discuss. In *Transcendentalism: a Reader*, Joel Myerson explains that the essential idea discussed by the Transcendentalists in the 19th century America was “that there is divinity within humankind and within nature, and that all divinity is perceivable by each person who lives a life in a way that is in harmony with spirit” (2000: xxviii). Myerson’s explanation is relatable to the romantic theology of William Ellery Channing which seems to be the trigger of transformation of many Transcendentalists from Unitarianism, in which, according to Philip and Ladd, he argued “that all human being could find the divine spirit within themselves” (2006: 33).

The evidences of Emerson as a Transcendentalist are very abundant in many of his writings. From all of his writings, Emerson is well-known for his earliest, most important essays, particularly those included in *Essays: First Series* (1841) and *Essays: Second Series* (1844). In those two collection of his essays, there are several famous essays of him which until today are still being read and learned worldwide like *Nature*, *The Over-Soul*, *Experience*, and one of his most liked, *Self-Reliance*. The ideas about Transcendentalism expressed in his essays are mostly about the relation of human life and everything in between such as nature, religion, other human beings, and so forth.

3.2.2 Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Self-Reliance*

Self-Reliance is an essay written by Emerson included in 1841's collection of his essays, *Essays: First Series*. Similar to all of the Emerson's essays, *Self-Reliance* is an essay that is full of encouragements. From the first to the last paragraph of *Self-Reliance*, to the writer point of view, he regularly declares his persuasive thoughts about self-reliance. These persuasive thoughts are the ideas that Emerson writes as a passionately encouraging cheer for people to recognize themselves as a human being and a person with greatness in things that may vary to every person.

Wilson explains, "in "Self-Reliance," Emerson wrote of the need for each man to think for himself, to trust in his own ability to understand, evaluate, and act" (2000: 68). To explain the *Self-Reliance*, Wilson moreover states:

Thus, self-reliance permits intuition, which allows the individual to grasp the divinity that enfolds the human and natural realms. Conformity is passive, while openness to intuition is part of an active, dynamic process. Reliance on tradition fixes values and understanding, preventing growth. Intuition, on the other hand,

a force of intense flux, results in the ever-higher perfection of man toward godliness (2000: 69).

The writer agrees with the explanation about *Self-Reliance* by Wilson in *Thoreau, Emerson, and Transcendentalism* because it states the exact same notion that he has learned after several times reading the essay. Emerson himself, to the writer's opinion, is very intuitive. He holds boldly what he would say "the inmost" as it is what he thinks should be "the outmost." Whatever one holds truly from within themselves, both from what they feel and what they think, should be set free into actions in various forms. About it, he additionally states in the essay that "whatever inly rejoices me, and the heart appoints" is sacred for everyone as a person (1995: 37).

Furthermore, regarding the "inmost" and "outmost" matters, *Self-Reliance* deals greatly with encouragements about respecting one's self in their nature, actions, interactions, and roles while struggling to be living life to the fullest. When dealing with one's nature, he expresses "no law can be sacred to me but that of my nature" (1995: 26). Nature is related to the character of a person. Never any law or standard can be measured as something greater than how we recognize our most original character as a person. As for one's actions and interactions, the writer considers both can be related to this quotation:

These are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world. Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members. Society is a joint-stock company, in which the members agree, for the better securing of his bread to each shareholder, to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater. The virtue in most request is conformity. Self-reliance is its aversion. It loves not realities and creators, but names and customs (Emerson, 1995: 25-26).

Although there are many to quote about actions and interactions, the writer thinks the preceding quotation explains society more boldly, in which he thinks one of the most concerned thoughts Emerson tries to express is the harm of society to one's self. And like what Emerson states, what seems to be the most ideal end a person can do to "play safe" is to conform to society.

Emerson absolutely does not like the idea of conforming to society. About it, he subtly repeats in *Self-Reliance* that nonconformity is a thing one must do in life as a person. To not conforming in society is something valuable to do as a way to respecting one's self. Nonconformity is mostly, if not wholly, what *Self-Reliance* is always about and popular for.

3.2.3 Nonconformity in Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Self-Reliance*

To see the main ideas of nonconformity, to get what it is all about, it is essential to read *Self-Reliance* since there are so many essential ideas of nonconformity stated by Emerson in the essay. To make it more trackable when quoting *Self-Reliance* throughout this writing, the writer uses the *Self-Reliance* text included in the collection of Emerson's works, *Essays and Poems*, consisting numerous of Emerson's selected works. In the ninth paragraph of *Self-Reliance*, as a statement that highly proposes nonconformity in a simple gesture, Emerson writes:

What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder, because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd

keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude (Emerson, 1995: 27-28).

The writer understands that to perform nonconformity and to be a nonconformist are the jobs we leave behind as a person when we regularly enter the society. Nonconformity is about how one can be a nonconformist in a world that conforms to society. Nonconformity is about staying true to ourselves even when the “world whips us with its displeasure” (Emerson, 1995: 28). Even when the uneasiness of society is striking like disease, we still have to be in union with our soul and mind. In our “actual” and “intellectual” life we have always been faced with burden from the society. Society demands us to do things we often despise. Emerson states that a person too, should never only listen or absorb things without experiencing the things themselves either the things good or bad (1995: 26).

Nonconformity, as Emerson would always say in the essay, is about the progress of our “inmost” as it is walking side by side with our intuition, and as our own belief meets with our intuition, consistency is really something we must set aside for it can delay our progress. He states “a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds” (1995: 29), and it means if one is being consistent for a thing that is never progressive and advantageous, especially for one’s self, it is the same as conformity.

Nonconformity is about self-trust, self-respect, and of course, self-reliance. In a proclamation-like passage, Emerson writes:

I appeal from your customs. I must be myself. I cannot break myself any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier. If you cannot, I will still seek to deserve that you should. I will not hide my tastes or aversions. I will so trust that what is deep is holy, that I will do strongly

before the sun and moon whatever inly rejoices me, and the heart appoints. If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. I do this not selfishly, but humbly and truly (1995: 37-38).

That quotation also expresses nonconformity in a deeper way. Emerson encourages us to escape from the customs if we truly have different beliefs with others, because it stops us from being ourselves. The interaction of us with society remains in how society acts to our nonconformity. Everything should depend on society if at last what we have done to not conforming cannot be understood by the society. At last, Emerson, regarding the truest needs of nonconformist, believes that “nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles” (1995: 46).

CHAPTER 4

NONCONFORMITY OF TEACHER AND STUDENTS IN PETER WEIR'S *DEAD POETS SOCIETY*

4.1 INTRINSIC ASPECTS

4.1.1 Theme

As a movie which is set mostly in a high school environment, *Dead Poets Society* really exposes the theme of high school friendship and the art of being adolescents. Focusing on the events of the characters that represent students, the theme of “high school friendship” appears in most part of the movie. There is a group of seven friends in the Welton Academy who are depicted continuously in the movie.

The second minor theme is the art of being adolescents. One cannot refuse the fact that when they are in the young-adult phase of their life, they will always want to have fun. This theme is depicted in the movie where apart from their school life, the students sneak to have fun in their life by doing things that they like, such as listening to rock n roll music and smoking cigarettes.

Being a high school student is the phase of life where one often declares as the moment to seek for one's identity. However, by being a high school student, one can never deny that it is the wildest and most independent time in their life in which it surely is the time where to have fun in one's life reaches its peak. So these two themes represent the joy of being young-adults, as known as teenagers.

The major theme of the movie is “freedom in life.” There are a bunch of scenes to portray this theme. John Keating's unusual teaching method represents the freedom

in his work. Neil Perry's disobedience toward his father represents the freedom in his role as a son. Neil Perry's suicide scene represents the freedom of oneself for his own life.

4.1.2 Setting

The first speech of Headmaster Gale Nolan in the movie, represents the effectiveness of a screenplay. It literally covers setting of place, time, and social environment of the movie in only one scene, the scene where Welton Academy begins its new semester. The following dialogue features Mr. Nolan speech:

Headmaster Nolan	: One hundred years ago in 1859, forty one boys sat in this room and were asked the same question that now greets you at the start of each semester. Gentlemen, what are the Four Pillars?
Welton Students	: Tradition. Honour. Discipline. Excellence.
Headmaster Nolan	: In her first year, Welton Academy graduated five students. Last year we graduated fifty one, and more than 75 percent of those went on to the Ivy League. (Parents clapping) This – this kind of accomplishment... is the result of fervent dedication to the principles taught here. This is why you parents have been sending us your sons. This is why we are the best preparatory school in the United States (parents clapping once again).

(*Dead Poets Society*, 00:02:44)

4.1.2.1 Setting of Place

Most of the story told in *Dead Poets Society* is set in an American preparatory high school named Welton Academy, a parochial preparatory school well-known for its alumnus that often enter the Ivy League. The setting of place of *Dead Poets Society* includes a church, several classrooms, a dormitory, a wood near the high school

building where the cave for the students to hang out reading poems is located, a theatre, and some houses of certain characters.



Picture 4.1
Dead Poets Society : 00:03:32



Picture 4.2
Dead Poets Society : 00:11:16



Picture 4.3
Dead Poets Society : 00:07:35



Picture 4.4
Dead Poets Society : 00:36:24

Picture 4.1 is the picture of the church in Welton Academy where the students and the teachers along with the school's headmaster gather to perform some ceremonies, or church services in the school. It is one evidence that the school is even stricter in its rules since it is parochial preparatory school which surely has a great Christian influence. Picture 4.2 shows the image of a classroom in Welton where in the movie, it is often used to set the sequences when John Keating teaches. As a preparatory school for boys, Welton is provided with a dormitory. Picture 4.3 is one of the examples of rooms inside the dormitory in which every room is occupied by two students. The room in the picture belongs to Neil Perry and Todd Anderson, and it is depicted in the

picture that Neil's best friends once in a while hanging out in his room. In picture 4.4, there is an image of a dark and humid cave, and it is used by the students who revive Dead Poets Society club as the place for them to hang out reading poems at night. The cave is located in the woods near the Welton Academy building.

4.1.2.2 Setting of Time

The story of the movie takes place around 1959. The Headmaster's opening speech previously quoted above states that the start of the semester, as the setting of time in the movie, is one hundred years away from 1859.

The song played in the movie by Meeks and Pitts on the radio entitled 'Let's Have a Party' is written by Jessie Mae Robinson in 1957 and in the movie, it is performed by Wanda Jackson in which it is included in her 1958 self-titled album.

4.1.2.3 Setting of Social Environment

Welton Academy, stated moreover by Headmaster Nolan in his opening speech as one of the best-regarded preparatory schools in USA, is not for everyone. In general, preparatory schools are the elite schools with a set of strict rules, high educational fee, and excellent facilities. Therefore, preparatory schools are for those who can be considered wealthy. In the movie, it is also apparent that the parents of Welton students drive their own cars in which it can also be the evident that the social environment of those who enroll in Welton is of the medium-high or high social class. In addition, 1950s era in United States was the era after World War II, and the nation's economic growth was in its best form.



Picture 4.5
Dead Poets Society : 00:04:30



Picture 4.6
Dead Poets Society : 00:04:37

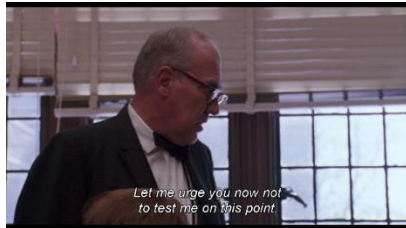
4.1.3 Character

Not only the setting, another reason that *Dead Poets Society* is interesting to be analyzed is the characters which exist in the movie. Schools, as educational institutions, consist of teachers and students as its main population. Apart from them, it has also school board and staffs that create, monitor, and evaluate the rules and everything that is going on inside the school. It is a sure thing that every teacher and student, especially in a school like Welton, should follow all the rules given by the school. *Dead Poets Society*'s characters are interesting to be analyzed because its main characters are a teacher and his students that somewhat break the rules.

4.1.3.1 John Keating, the Teacher & Captain

John Keating is the biggest protagonist and the first major character in the movie. Played by Robin Williams, Keating's character shows a set of personalities which describe that he is: unconventional, cleverly humorous, extremely open-minded, and passionate. He is also depicted as an English Teacher who frequently uses philosophical ideas of his own and certain literary works in his teaching.

According to the trivia section of the movie published in Imdb.com, John Keating is a teacher that Robin Williams had always desired to have when he was still a student (*Dead Poets Society* (1989) - Trivia - Imdb, n.d.). That statement is clear if being related to the way he acts and interacts in the movie, especially to his students. The introductory evidence of Keating's personality can be seen in the four scenes below.



Picture 4.7
Dead Poets Society : 00:11:15



Picture 4.8
Dead Poets Society : 00:12:19



Picture 4.9
Dead Poets Society : 00:12:58



Picture 4.10
Dead Poets Society : 00:14:27

The first introduction of Keating personalities can be seen in his first day of teaching in Welton, portrayed in the four scenes above. Before cutting to the scene where Keating performs his first teaching, the movie goes on to the montage that depicts the way other teachers in Welton teach. Picture 4.7 is one part of the montage sequence about how other teachers teach.

There are moments in the montage sequence where the students seem to not enjoying what they are studying. The students seem to be forced to follow other teachers' way of teaching, in which they are dull, conventional, difficult, and forceful. These teachers include the chemistry, Latin, and trigonometry teachers. In picture 4.7, it is portrayed that one of the teachers in Welton who teaches trigonometry forces the students that they have to work really hard not to fail the trigonometry class. This montage sequence shows how hard it is to study in an elite preparatory school like Welton because there are many conventional teachers that seem capable to teach but incapable to communicate and to understand the students.

The writer thinks at this point, Peter Weir, the director of the movie, wants to show something to the audience about the education world by cutting the montage sequence to John Keating's first teaching scene. As a way of opposing the conventional teachers, the writer believes by cutting to Keating's scene as portrayed in picture 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10, Peter Weir wants to show that there is still "hope" in Welton, if hope means a teacher that the students need the most. Picture 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 depict how John Keating, a newly recruited English teacher in Welton, seems to be a different but a fresh thing for the students.

Different from every other teacher who already starts their subject on the first meeting, in picture 4.8 Keating takes his students to the school's entrance hall to introduce himself and to start some introductory chit-chats with the students. This scene is the introductory scene about John Keating as the protagonist, and as the first major character in the movie. His character is given a longer portion of scene in this sequence

about the first day of teaching in Welton, and his character is shown to oppose the other teachers whose characters, can be seen from their ways of teaching, are characterized to be conventional.

John Keating is an unconventional person. To introduce themselves and to start their teaching in a new semester, newly recruited teachers will generally say in a brief words about their identity, and then they start teaching their subject. However, John Keating has a more interesting way to introduce himself to the students which covers not only his personality, but also his valuable role to the students. Picture 4.8 leads to picture 4.9, a scene that foreshadows John Keating's entire role in the movie. Keating uses the phrase "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman about Abraham Lincoln to exchange the use of usual teacher calls such as "Sir" and "Mister".

In this scene in fact, he actually lets the student to call him Mr. Keating, but he seemingly insists the students to call him "O Captain! My Captain!" because he thinks such calling is a more adventurous way of calling a teacher (*Dead Poets Society*, 00:12:58). "Captain", in its simplest definition, means an individual who leads. It indicates the main point of Keating's character to be a leader for the students. He is characterized as the one who leads the students. The writer believes that it criticizes the fact that teachers in modern education world only focus on teaching the students without leading them.

Picture 4.10, which includes the monologue below, shows his enormous passion to encourage his students to respect their life.

Keating: Because we are foods for worm, lads. Because believe it or not each and every one of us in this room is one day going to stop breathing, turn cold, and die. (Turning to the trophy cabinet) I would like you to step forward over here and peruse some of the faces from the past. You've walked past them many times. I don't think you've really looked at them. (Students looking at the old photos of Welton alumni inside the trophy cabinet in the school hall) They're not that different from you are they? Same haircuts, full of hormones just like you. Invincible, just like you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they're destined for great things just like many of you. Their eyes are full of hope just like you. Did they wait until it was too late to make from their lives even one iota of what they were capable? Because you see gentlemen, these boys are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you. Go on, lean in! (Keating and the students leaning in to the cabinet) Listen! Do you hear it? (Whispering) *Carpe...* hear it? *Carpe...* *carpe diem*. Seize the day, boys... make your lives extraordinary.

(*Dead Poets Society*, 00:14:43)

From the monologue above, it can be seen that Keating wants his students to open their eyes and stimulate their minds to a deeper, more valuable thing to do: *carpe diem*. *Carpe diem*, meaning “seize the day” in Latin expression, is the phrase Keating uses to encourage the students to live their life to the fullest. In a lifetime that is very limited, the only thing the youth can do is to live every moment of their life in order to be alive as a fulfilled human being. Additionally, the writer also believes that all the scenes regarding the depiction of Keating actions in the movie relate to how Keating means to do something more for his students apart from teaching; he wants the students to regard learning as an adventure or as a journey of their life.

4.1.3.2 The Students, the Horrible Phalanx of Pubescence

“The Horrible Phalanx of Pubescence” is one phrase in the movie that is relatable to the students. It is said by Mr. McAllister, played by Leon Pownall, while

the students are in a rush to go into their classes (*Dead Poets Society*, 00:10:23). It is relatable to the students because it states the idea of being an adolescent: always in a rush to do anything.

The writer thinks it is reasonable to say that puberty, especially in high school years and environment, is the earliest phase of a person's identity searching. In the high school world, young people encounter a lot of new experiences from their teachers and their friends. From the teachers' lectures, young people get various knowledges about everything, and from the interaction with their friends, they know different characters. Later, these experiences will always trigger young people to search for their identity both within individual and social life.

In *Self-Reliance*, Emerson writes about how young people are the most important individuals that society should take into account. Labelling them as "the master of society", Emerson argues that young people should be taken into account because they are independent, irresponsible, rushed in everything they do either it is good or bad, silly, eloquent, and troublesome, but they are filled with curiosity and have a genuine opinion (1995: 25). Even though it sounds paradoxical, the writer believes Emerson has a serious point to express to society in that argument. It criticizes the situation of society, in which its conforming people that are mostly adult, is static, conventional, and fearful of consequences. Society needs to be refreshed with the new minds of young people that are dynamic, unconventional, and careless of the consequences. It might be resulted in an unorganized situation, and for that reason, the

adult, while letting the young people to function, should also keep an eye on them so that they will always be on the right track.

Studying in Welton, the students still in a simple way, just want to live their life through experiencing things and having fun. However, they do not have the proper teachers but Keating, as the adults to keep an eye on them. That is why Keating's role is highly important to the students because he is depicted as the only teacher to understand what seems to be the more valuable thing to do as a teacher. Once again, it is Keating who becomes the "Captain" to the students, the "Horrible Phalanx of Pubescence".



Picture 4.11
Dead Poets Society: 00:28:14



Picture 4.12
Dead Poets Society: 00:30:34



Picture 4.13
Dead Poets Society: 00:34:46

In correlation to the title, Dead Poets Society is a club of some Welton students who will go out at night sneakily into a wood near the high school area and enter an

Indian cave in the wood to hang out reading poems. The club first pioneered by John Keating and his friends when he was still studying in Welton as can be seen from his yearbook profile in picture 4.11. After long years of hiatus, the club is revived once again by seven of John Keating's students. The students who revive the Dead Poets Society club are the main characters in the movie from the students' side, in which they are Neil Perry, Todd Anderson, Knox Overstreet, Richard Cameron, Steven Meeks, Gerard Pitts, and Charlie Dalton. These students turn to be more adventurous after they meet and be taught by Keating.

In the sequence above, these seven students try to find out what the club is all about and try to revive it. When asked about the club, Keating's response slightly shocks the students. Keating says that the school board will not be pleasant to hear about the club (*Dead Poets Society*, 00:29:14). Keating's first statement about the club indicates that Dead Poets Society club is the club that does not conforming to the school. While it seems to be held out of the school's building and schedule, the club's agenda is in fact harmless.

Knox : You mean it was a bunch of guys sitting around reading poetry?
 Keating : No Mr. Overstreet, it wasn't just "guys", we weren't a Greek organization, we were romantics. We didn't just read poetry, we let it drip from our tongues like honey. Spirits soared, women swooned, and gods were created, gentlemen, not a bad way to spend an evening eh?

(*Dead Poets Society*, 00:29:29).

Keating said that the club was established to "sucking the marrow out of lives". The phrase is the metaphor that relates to the purpose of the club to be the place for the

students to use poems as the means to live their life to the fullest. Its purposes also apparent as Keating says “spirit soared, women swooned, and gods were created”. The club had made its former members to be free-spirited and romantic nonconformists. “Spirit soared” can be referred to how their life had changed to be a free-spirited one, where they could live freely. “Women swooned” relates to how they had become romantics, in which it can be considered that women liked them. The writer considers that “gods were created” is the most important phrase. “Gods” can be related to a being that is unrestricted. Dead Poets Society club had created nonconformists in the past, and they were all the men that were independent.

The dialogue above continues to picture 4.12 and picture 4.13. The two scenes show that they are starting to be more interested, motivated, and moved by John Keating. The students have found a teacher that has a similar passion as themselves. To look at the fact of our life, it is so often “in every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts”, and “they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty” (Emerson, 1995: 23). However, there are still a lot of individuals that hide these rejected thoughts even though they have found the man who can guide them.

In picture 4.12, the students are motivated to revive the club, and as provoked by Neil, they decide to start going out to the wood that very night. The writer believes that a great cinematic work has been done in the scene depicted in picture 4.13. It depicts the scene where these seven students of John Keating finally go out to the wood. In the opinion of the writer, the composition of this scene represents the turning point of the students’ character. With a long shot camera distance, the students were shot

from behind showing that they are running to a bluish night full of fog. It symbolizes that the students is at the gate of their extraordinary life. The dark shot of their beings from behind symbolizes that they are about to find their “colours” or, who they really are after they make it through the foggy night representing the uncertain time to come.

4.1.3.3 Neil Perry and Todd Anderson

Both Neil Perry and Todd Anderson live under the shadow of their family members. Neil Perry is an optimistic, ambitious, and friendly young man who has a tough father, Mr. Perry. Todd Anderson is a shy, introverted, and pessimistic young man whose brother is one of the best Welton alumni. They have to suit themselves to the family responsibility that each of them are burdened with.



Picture 4.14
Dead Poets Society : 00:04:55



Picture 4.15
Dead Poets Society : 00:07:23



Picture 4.16
Dead Poets Society : 00:08:05



Picture 4.17
Dead Poets Society : 00:08:25

Todd is being reminded by Headmaster Nolan as can be seen in picture 4.14 that he has a responsibility in continuing his brother's achievement, and it is even bitter for him to be welcomed by his friends with the fame of his brother in picture 4.15. In picture 4.16, Neil tries to argue with Mr. Perry that he has to reduce his extracurricular activities, resulting in a slight annoyance of his father. It leads to the scene in picture 4.15, a depiction of a tough character Mr. Perry has. Below is a dialogue in the movie between Neil Perry and Todd Anderson that describes the difference between them.

Neil : For the first time in my whole life, I know what I want to do... and for the first time, I'm gonna do it whether my father wants me to or not!
Carpe diem!

Todd : Neil, Neil, hold it... how are you gonna be in a play if your father won't let you?

Neil : First I gotta get the part, then I can worry about that.

Todd : But won't he kill you if he finds out you went to an audition and didn't even tell him?

Neil : No, no, no... as far as I'm concerned he won't have to know about any of this.

Todd : Well, that's impossible.

Neil : Bullshit! Nothing's impossible.

Todd : Well, why don't you just call him and ask him and... maybe he'll say yes.

Neil : That's a laugh... if I don't ask him at least I won't be disobeying him.

Todd : Yeah, but if he said no before---

Neil : Jesus, Todd! Whose side are you on?

(*Dead Poets Society*, 00:46:02)

From the dialogue above, the writer thinks *Dead Poets Society* wins the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay in 1990 for many reasons including the wittiness of Tom Schulman in screen-writing many dialogues in the movie that describe the characters. The dialogue above is one of those dialogues, and it can be seen that the portrayal of those two characters' personality are apparent.

Neil's friendly personality can also be seen in picture 4.15. In that scene he introduces Todd to his best friends. Neil's optimistic and ambitious personality appears in his reaction after he gets the audition pamphlet for a play. Quoted in the dialogue above, to be an actor is his biggest dream. However, it is his own father to be the biggest obstacle to reach his biggest dream. Neil still goes to the audition, and later in the movie, he gets the part for the play.

Picture 4.15 also depicts Todd as a shy and introverted person. Even though being introduced by Neil to his best friends, Todd only concentrates in his stuff without having an interaction with them. Todd's pessimism is clear in the dialogue above. It is Neil who should be worried a lot about Mr. Perry, but Todd appears to be the worrier one. The dialogue shows that every Todd's reaction to Neil's saying expresses worries.

4.1.3.4 Knox Overstreet

In *Dead Poets Society*, the character that represents "women swooned" is Knox Overstreet. He has a character of a sensitive and romantic young man who in picture 4.18 and 4.19 below is depicted to be captivated to meet Chris Noel, the girl of his dream, for the first time.



Picture 4.18
Dead Poets Society : 00:18:51



Picture 4.19
Dead Poets Society : 00:18:55



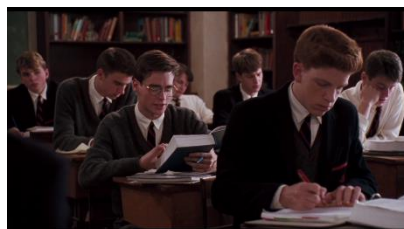
Picture 4.20
Dead Poets Society : 00:20:05



Picture 4.21
Dead Poets Society : 00:20:26

4.1.3.5 Richard Cameron

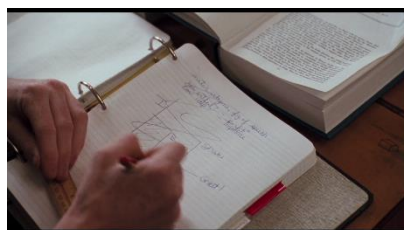
Richard Cameron has a round character. He has both the protagonist and the antagonist role that can be seen from his inconsistency. In only about three minutes, as can be seen in the four shots below, Cameron's inconsistent personality can be noticed. At first in picture 4.22, he listens in focus and takes note of everything Keating says. However, as Keating begins to mock poetry theory, he confuses, scratches his notes, hesitates about ripping the introduction pages, and finally rips the pages.



Picture 4.22
Dead Poets Society : 00:22:13



Picture 4.23
Dead Poets Society : 00:22:47



Picture 4.24



Picture 4.25

Dead Poets Society : 00:23:48

Dead Poets Society : 00:25:50

4.1.3.6 Charlie Dalton

Charlie Dalton is a wild, daring, and free-spirited young man. In picture 4.26, his wild personality is depicted as he is the one who rips the introduction pages of poetry book. Secondly, in picture 4.27, it can be seen that he is a daring person as he is also the first one who is interested in Neil's idea of reviving the club. The third one is the depiction of his free-spirited personality. One of the poems that he writes and says aloud is: "to indeed be a God".



Picture 4.26

Dead Poets Society : 00:23:15



Picture 4.27

Dead Poets Society : 00:31:04



Picture 4.28

Dead Poets Society : 00:52:01

4.1.3.7 Gerard Pitts and Steven Meeks

Pitts and Meeks' portion in the movie is not as large as the other students, but they are occasionally depicted in the same shot. Meeks is smart while Pitts has a

standard intelligence. It can be seen in the scene where Pitts is insisted by Neil to join the first night walk to the wood but refuses because his grades are not in a good condition (*Dead Poets Society*, 00:31:14). They both love radio, music, and dancing.



Picture 4.29
Dead Poets Society : 00:20:39



Picture 4.30
Dead Poets Society : 00:45:23

4.1.3.8 The Antagonists: Headmaster Gale Nolan and Mr. Perry

Shown in 4.32 below, Headmaster Nolan and Mr. Perry are colleagues. Headmaster Gale Nolan is a prideful man who is the chairman of Welton Academy who wants only the best for his school. He is also depicted to be a strict and discipline man. Mr. Perry is Neil Perry's father. He is a tough father of Neil, and he is also a prideful breadwinner that demands respect from his son by asking Neil to obey him.



Picture 4.31
Dead Poets Society : 00:03:46



Picture 4.32
Dead Poets Society : 00:05:04



Picture 4.33
Dead Poets Society : 00:08:06

4.1.4 Conflict

There are two greatest conflicts in the movie that influence the plot majorly. The first greatest conflict is man against man, and in the movie, it happens between Neil Perry and his father. Their conflict is mostly about the disobedience of Neil Perry of his father's will that he should leave the play.

Neil : No, I can't. I have the main part. The performance is tomorrow night.
Mr. Perry : I don't care if the world comes to an end tomorrow night. You are through with that play. Is that clear? Is that clear?

(*Dead Poets Society* : 01:23:14)

The second greatest conflict is between man and society or the rules given by society, and it exists in John Keating character and his extraordinary teaching method to be explained below.

4.2 EXTRINSIC ASPECTS

4.2.1 Nonconformity Perspective of John Keating as Teacher

4.2.1.1 Keating's Way of Thinking

In *First Things First*, Covey argues that living life to the fullest can be fulfilled well if one has the need to live, to love, to learn, and to leave a legacy (2015: 37). John

Keating's way of thinking can be related to his purpose to be the "captain" of his students. In the opinion of the writer, Keating's role as a "captain" makes him to think that those four needs are the things that the students need the most.

Keating wants the students to have the need to live. It is shown when he uses the "carpe diem" phrase in his monologue quoted above (*Dead Poets Society*, 00:14:43). He wants his students to live every day of their life to the fullest; he wants them to live every day as it is their last day, because a person should never waste a day worrying about tomorrow. Keating also says to the students that they have to make their life extraordinary.

To have the need to love and to learn to pursue a fulfilled life is also one of Keating's ways of thinking. As young people, the students are filled with passion, and the best way to channel their passion is through loving and learning. These two needs are combined as Keating's English class starts. By learning poetry, the students can find beauty in words and phrases that has certain meanings and ideas.

The need to leave a legacy is the need that Keating has already had. As a "captain" for his students, what he should do is leading them, but he has a lot more in it. By leading them, Keating has also had inspire and motivate his students to be a nonconformist like himself.

Moreover, to look at a meaning in teaching, the writer believes that it should involve both the teacher and the students. The nonconformity that Keating performs can be considered highly positive because he does it extremely but properly, and it has a great effect to his students to also become a nonconformist.

4.2.1.2 Keating's Extraordinary Teaching Method

Teaching is one of those jobs that need a very big devotion and passion because its main object is very valuable: to enrich people with knowledge. Enriching people with knowledge requires an absolute devotion and passion, not merely one of the which, because when teachers teach, they should not retake something from the students except the satisfaction about the priceless knowledge that they receive.

Keating's set of personalities is important to build his extraordinary teaching method while he teaches English, especially poetry. One of the most important parts in the plot regarding the extraordinariness of his teaching is the scene where he tells his students to rip the introduction pages of a poetry theory book.

Keating : We're not laying pipe, we're talking about poetry. I mean, how can you describe poetry like American Bandstand? I like Byron, I give him a 42, but I can't dance to it.
 Now I want you to rip out that page. (The students look confused) Go on, rip out the entire page. You heard me, rip it out. Rip it out!
 Go on, rip it out. (Charlie Dalton rips the page firstly)
 Thank you Mr. Dalton. Gentlemen, tell you what, don't just tear out that page, tear out the entire introduction. I want it gone, history. Leave nothing of it. Rip it out. Rip! Begone J. Evans Pritchard, Ph.D. Rip, shred, tear. Rip it out. I want to hear nothing but ripping of Mr. Pritchard.

(Dead Poets Society, 00:22:40)

The monologue above also shows his hilariousness of a person. What seems to be the point of this scene is that he teaches poetry extremely but in the most proper way.

The conformity in teaching commonly requires the students to follow the theory from the book given by the teacher. It is important to know the theory of certain lectures, but in the poetry world, there should be something more beyond the theory to

be taught to the students. The writer believes there is an important reason that Keating considers poetry learning to be a “war” as can be seen in the monologue below.

Keating : Keep ripping gentlemen. This is a battle, a war. And the casualties could be your hearts and souls. (Keating holds out the basket to Charlie Dalton) Thank you Mr. Dalton.
Armies of academics going forward, measuring poetry. No, we will not have that here. No more of Mr. J. Evans Pritchard. Now in my class you will learn to think for yourselves again. You will learn to savor words and language. No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world.

(Dead Poets Society : 00:24:34)

The nonconformity represented in the monologue above is an encouragement Keating gives to the students about the meaning in poetry learning. As previously stated, his teaching method is extreme but highly proper. A poem can be a representation of a person’s ideas and feelings. If it is learned theoretically without any practicality, it remains useless. That is the reason why Keating considers poetry learning as a “war”. It is the best chance for the students to have a meaning in learning; that they have to think for themselves without any boundaries from the teacher.

The monologue above continues to the monologue below.

Keating : We don’t read and write poetry because it’s cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race, and the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering... these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry... beauty, romance, love... these are what we stay alive for. To quote from Whitman, “O me, O life... of the questions of these recurring, of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities filled with the foolish. What good amid these O me, O life? Answer: That you are here. That life exists and identity. That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse.” (Pauses) “That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse.” What will your verse be?

(Dead Poets Society, 00:24:58)

In the monologue above, Keating tries to convey the most important thing about poetry to a human being. He states that human stays alive for the things expressed in poetry such as beauty, romance, and love. The difference between poetry and lectures such as medicine, law, and business is that poetry deals not merely about human survival, but human life. People should not be only exist, but they should live. Through words and ideas, people can live their life to the fullest. The phrase “you may contribute a verse” indicates the encouragement that every person in this world has the same chance to be who they want to be.

4.2.1.3 Reaction upon the Nonconformity

“For nonconformity the world whips you with its displeasure” (Emerson, 1995: 28). Keating, as a nonconformist, surely has to experience negative reactions from several individuals. In the movie, there are individuals that dislike his deeds. Those individuals are Mr. McAllister, Headmaster Nolan, and Mr. Perry.



Picture 4.34
Dead Poets Society : 00:27:35



Picture 4.35
Dead Poets Society : 01:19:53



Picture 4.36
Dead Poets Society : 01:39:00

Picture 4.34 shows the reaction by Mr. McAllister about the book ripping. When criticized to not making the students an artist, Keating tells him that he only wants the students to be a free thinker, in which to McAllister opinion, is dangerous. In picture 4.35, once again, Keating is faced with Headmaster Nolan arguing his discipline. Keating wants the students to think for themselves but Nolan thinks it is the best to follow the school rules. The last negative reaction upon Keating's nonconformity is from Mr. Perry, as can be seen in picture 4.36. Mr. Perry is annoyed by Keating, and he tells Keating to stay away from Neil. Mr. Perry blindly blames Keating for his own son dream of being an actor.

4.2.2 Nonconformity Perspectives of John Keating's Students

The nonconformity of the students is started when John Keating starts to give his motivation to the students. Their nonconformity starts to grow as they choose the Dead Poets Society club as their channel to live their life to the fullest. There are consequences to take to be a nonconformist that are depicted in the students' nonconformity acts.

The first act of nonconformity is struggling to reach for what one loves and believes, depicted in Knox Overstreet and Charlie Dalton certain scenes. Emerson's argument about a man's deed is that man "must take himself for better, for worse as his portion" (1995: 24). This happens to both Knox Overstreet and Charlie Dalton's act of nonconformity.

Knox Overstreet takes a better portion for himself as he is to reach for the one he loves, Chris Noel. After saying "*carpe diem*", he kisses Chris in one scene in the party, resulted in him being beaten by Chet Danburry, Chris' boyfriend. Picture 4.37 and 4.38 below indicate Knox's bravery and struggle that he does not care about Chet by showing up to Chris' school to say that he loves Chris. His struggle slightly succeeds when in one scene before going to the theatre, Chris is starting to actually care about him by accepting to go with him and warning him about Chet. Knox gets Chris' affection is one consequence of his nonconformity act.



Picture 4.37
Dead Poets Society : 01:27:43



Picture 4.38
Dead Poets Society : 01:27:48

Charlie Dalton is the most nonconformist of them all. In picture 4.39 below, Dalton admits that he wrote an article in the school newspaper about allowing girls in Welton by blatantly doing a joke in the middle of church service. The foolish, rule-

breaking Dalton is a worse portion of nonconformity. He does know that he will be punished, but he does not care, and finally he is being punished by the Headmaster. After that, Keating tells him that “there’s a time for daring, and there’s a time for caution”, showing that his foolish action is wrong (*Dead Poets Society*, 01:20:37).



Picture 4.39
Dead Poets Society : 01:16:30



Picture 4.40
Dead Poets Society : 01:17:15

Another act of nonconformity is Neil Perry against his father. It is about how one conforms to his social role as a son, forcing him to obey his father, but at the very peak of his own solitude, he still holds highly what he wants and rebels. The norm that exists in society is that “parents have authority over their children” (Tischler, 2007: 123). Neil Perry works so hard to perform in a play but his father refuses him. However, as he is an ambitious young man, he never gives up. With or without his father’s permission, he should perform in the play he always wanted to play in. Neil’s ambition represents his nonconformity in doing what one loves to do despite the limits.

At the climax sequence of the movie, a tragically enlightening scene occurs. After the play, Neil finally finds himself going back into his home again with his father and arguing about going into a military school. What Neil Perry always does his entire life is ascribing to his status as a son. When arguing with his father about his dream, he

is asked about what he wants. He does not say one thing until his father presses the statement that if he cannot do the play any longer. Next thing going on is Neil saying “nothing” and killing himself (*Dead Poets Society*, 01:40:31).

Durkheim, in *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, argues that people who commit suicide tend to have their own reason and they can be divided into several types. Neil’s type is egocentric suicide. He also adds that one of the causes of egocentric suicide is a person’s suffering in ascribing to his family role (2005: 171). It is relatable to Emerson’s encouragement and Neil’s action that as a person, to escape from what society, represented here by Mr. Perry, forces us to do is by being ourselves and releasing all the burden we have got from society (1995: 37).



Picture 4.41
Dead Poets Society : 01:43:44



Picture 4.42
Dead Poets Society : 01:45:47

The sequence above taken in Perry’s home shows that Neil feels his home is like a cage. A low-angle, medium long shot of Neil gazing through the window in picture 4.41 indicates the will of Neil to be free and the imagery that he is powerful to himself, showing that the point of view of the audience is to look up to him. This scene shows that at the moment Neil is in the greatest freedom to himself since he is about to

take his own life. It shows the mind blowing concept of nonconformity where taking our own life seems to be the last act of freedom one can do to oneself, because to have the most independent self, one has to believe that “nothing can bring you peace but yourself” (Emerson, 1995: 46). Neil’s suicide describes the peace that he has always desired to have to be himself. The solution he chooses to do to bring peace to himself about the burden from his father is to be a god for himself by taking his own life.

At the end of the movie, Keating is fired from the school because the school and the parents believe he is the cause of Neil’s suicide. The shy, introverted Todd Anderson turns into the one that protects Keating the most through the end of the movie. He turns out to be the one who is influenced greatly by Keating. At this point, Cameron’s inconsistency reaches its peak. Rather than protecting Keating, he tells on Keating that he has put him and his friends into a nonsensical way of life that leads to Neil’s suicide, and Todd strongly argues that Neil does love acting, not because of Keating (*Dead Poets Society*, 01:55:03).

In the very last scenes of the movie, Keating is depicted to go into the English class taught substitutionally by Headmaster Nolan to take his stuffs before departing from Welton. Four pictures below show how Todd has turned into a braver man as he is dare to speak up and protect Keating very eagerly. Todd speaks up in front of Headmaster Nolan about Keating’s innocence to the cause of Neil’s death in picture 4.43. It leads to one of the most important scenes in the movie about nonconformity in picture 4.44 and 4.45.



Picture 4.43
Dead Poets Society : 02:02:50



Picture 4.44
Dead Poets Society : 02:03:30



Picture 4.45
Dead Poets Society : 02:04:39



Picture 4.46
Dead Poets Society : 02:05:06

Todd stands up on his desk, saluting respect to Keating before his departure by shouting to him “O Captain, My Captain”. It triggers the other students to also pay respects to Keating by standing up on their desks. His bravery shows that he believes in what is right and what is wrong about the truth. Todd’s action shows that “all persons have their moments of reason, when they look out into the region of absolute truth; then will they justify me and do the same thing” (Emerson, 1995: 38). In the tragedy that happens to Neil, Todd stays true to his belief that what Neil means to take his own life is absolutely what he wants out of his life, and about Keating, he stays true to his belief that Keating has nothing to do with Neil’s suicide. It shows that what he does is to justify the right thing Keating has done to him and the students, and the wrong thing the school has done to Keating.

Todd Anderson's last act of nonconformity shows that he has become a renewed person. Friedrich Nietzsche, who was greatly influenced by Emerson (1995: xxi), once writes that the worst enemy of a person is that person's own self (2006: 47). Todd has conquered his introverted self to stand for what is right for him and Keating in the last scene of the movie. He shows the bravery of a leader by showing his principle thoughts that Keating is right and the only captain for the students. Keating responds by saying his gratitude to the students who are brave and loyal enough to stand for him until his last day at Welton. The last scene of the movie shows that at last what really matters is "the triumph of principles" (Emerson, 1995: 46).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Dead Poets Society shows to the world that school can be a place for young people to learn about life if there is a right teacher. John Keating is the illustration of that kind of teacher. Teaching English in an American preparatory school named Welton that has teachers to teach but not to lead, Keating has become the only captain to lead the students to live their life to the fullest through words from poems and philosophical ideas from certain figures.

Keating is a nonconformist, and there are several aspects of nonconformity that exist in *Dead Poets Society* depicted in his character and he has changed seven of his students into a nonconformist too using motivations and encouragements. The aspects of nonconformity represented by Keating and seven of his students are related to Ralph Waldo Emerson's idea of nonconformity in *Self-Reliance*.

Keating's nonconformity actions can be seen from his way of thinking and his extraordinary teaching method. On the other hand, the students' nonconformity actions are started and can be seen as they are motivated and encouraged by Keating. Among the seven students are Knox Overstreet who has struggled to reach for his love, Charlie Dalton who has been the most nonconformist of the students, Neil Perry who has freed himself from the burden of his father, and Todd Anderson who has conquered himself. All of these nonconformity actions result in consequences which are either good or bad, but they highly show the idea of living life to the fullest.

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